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ABSTRACT

Professionals staffing the advertising industry have a double role to fulfill. They must perform in a manner which will maximize their clients' economic goals as well as maintain a sense of social responsibility which is entrusted with any and every mass media decision-maker. Little research has been done, to date, on which personal qualities exhibited by advertising executives are predictive of successful attainment of both roles. Described are the potentially different socially responsible behavior exhibited by male and female advertising executives. Sex may be predictive of unique perspectives brought into the social responsibility role. The potential for successful completion of the male and female advertising executives' economic role should be examined in future research. (Author/CJ)

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# Differences in Socially Responsible Behavior By Male and Female Advertising Executives

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"Differences in Socially Responsible Behavior
By Male and Female Advertising Executives"

Professionals staffing the advertising industry have a double role to fulfill. They must perform in a manner which will maximize their clients' economic goals as well as maintain a sense of social responsibility which is entrusted with any and every mass media decision-maker.[1] Which personal qualities exhibited by advertising executives are predictive of successful attainment of both roles? Unfortunately, very little research has been undertaken in this area.

This paper attempts to describe the potentially different socially responsible behavior exhibited by male and female advertising executives. Sex may be predictive of unique perspectives brought irto the social responsibility role. The potential for successful completion of the male and female advertising executives' economic role will be left for study in later research.

## Prior Research

Earlier studies have dealt with the personality structure of advertising-public relations students. Surlin found that, compared to journalism majors, advertising-public relations majors felt that it was less "important to consider the ethical and philosophical aspects of journalism and mass communication."[2] Within the same study, Surlin found that high authoritarian and high powerless alienated (fatalistic) students indicated less concern for ethics and social responsibility than low authoritarian and low powerless alienated students.[3]

A previous study had found that authoritarianism, a personality profile characterized as prejudiced, narrow-minded, rigid-thinking, and generally anti-intellectual, was related to one's desire to enter the field of advertising. Findings show that high authoritarian individuals are attracted to the advertising field more so than low authoritarian individuals.[4]

When dealing with sex differences, specifically, findings are revealing. Male and female advertising students do exhibit a difference in perceiving themselves and advertising executives. It was found that:

> "Female advertising students have a more positive self-image than do male advertising students, as well as having a more positive image of a 'successful' individual in advertising. Also, female ad majors see themselves, and the 'successful' advertising practitioner, as being more sincere and honest than do male ad majors."[5]

Thus, previous findings tend to indicate that advertising students exhibit a lower concern for ethics and social responsibility than journalism students. Likewise, high authoritarian students exhibit a low concern for ethics and social responsibility and the higher authoritarian student is more apt to be interested in advertising as a career than the low authoritarian student. However, female advertising students exhibit a more "honest" and "sincere" approach to the advertising profession.

Research has shown that high authoritarian advertising executives do behave in a less socially responsible manner by willingly excluding black models from their ads.[6] Does a more "socially responsible" approach to the advertising field carry over to practicing female advertising executives when compared to practicing male advertising executives? Prior research indicates that females will perform in a more socially responsible manner.

## Study

The population sampled in this study consists of advertising executives in Atlanta, Georgia. A total of 393 advertising men and women were selected according to their executive positions in 98 of the nearly 150 advertising agencies in Atlanta.[7] The sample included agency presidents, vice-presidents, account supervisors and executives, and media, copy, research, and production executives. These names were located in both the August 1973 edition of the Advertising Agency Red Book, and the March 1973 edition of Southern Advertising Markets.

In February 1974 all selected advertising executives were mailed a package including a cover letter, the questionnaire, and a self-addressed stamped envelope. The main portion of the questionnaire analyzed in this paper consists of twelve statements dealing with the respondents' self-reported professional behavior.

Each statement relates to a particular advertising appeal or technique that has social responsibility implications. For example, the statements were stated in this manner: "I would use a sex appeal in an advertisement"; "I would use scenes depicting violence in my advertisements"; "I would use puffery in my advertisements"; "I would use fear appeals in my advertisements." Each executive responded to each of the twelve statements on a five-interval Likert scale running from "Strongly Agree" to "Strongly Disagree."

Statistical analysis consisted of the t-test statistic comparing male and female subgroup responses on each of the twelve behavior statements.

## Findings

One hundred and twelve (N=112) advertising executives, or 28% of the total questionnaires mailed, responded to the items and returned the questionnaire. Of the total number of returned questionnaires, eighty-five (n=85)

were returned by males and twenty-seven (n=27) were returned by females.

Of the twelve socially responsible advertising content decisions, male and female advertising executives differed on eight to a statistically significant degree. For the eight decisions showing significant differences,

- - - Table #1 about here - - -

females exhibited more socially responsible behavior in all eight cases.

No significant difference was found between male and female advertising executives for the personal use of:

(1) A vanity appeal to advertise cosmetic, diet, or other similar products.

(2) Poor English in order to advertise a product.

(3) Black models in advertisements other than for black-oriented products.

(4) Love portrayed in an advertisement as the spending of money and giving of goods.

In general, advertising executives agree that they would use a vanity appeal and black models in ads, while they disagree that they would misuse the English language or the portrayal of love as the giving of goods.

The decision areas which exhibited significant differences were for the use of: (from least to most different)

(1) Dramatized war scenes to advertise children's war toys, dolls, and games.

(2) "Snob appeals" in advertisements.

(3) Fear appeals in advertisements.

(4) Puffery in advertisements.

(5) Scenes depicting violence in advertisements.

(6) People being wasteful of material sources in advertisements.

(7) Married life portrayed as problems that can be solved by the purchasing of products.

(8) Sex appeal in advertisements.

In general, advertising executives disagree that they would use these techniques; however, females advertising executives are more adamant in their decisions. As with "vanity appeals," advertisers generally agree that they will use "snob appeals." Likewise, there is general agreement that sex appeals would be used in their advertisements.

The two most significantly different decision areas deal with sex-related topics. Likewise, the greater sense of social responsibility exhibited by female advertising executives surfaces in topic areas which social critics and scientists have found to be most open to criticism, "the portrayal of married life"[8] and "sex appeal."[9]

It is interesting to compare self-reported behavior differences (which clearly support the expectation that female advertising executives will be more socially responsible) to the self-professed desire, by the responding executives, to be socially responsible. As part of the larger questionnaire, executives responded on a five-interval Likert scale to this item: "I am highly interested in serving the social needs of the public." Male advertising executives were significantly more apt to self-report a concern for serving the social needs of the public. (See Table #2)

- - - Table #2 about here - - -

However, when given an opportunity to exercise their social service male executives are less socially responsible in their behavior than are female executives.

There may be many reasons which explain greater socially responsible behavior by females, such as their relative second-class status for so many years in our society, but a possible indication is reflected in biographic data also collected in the larger questionnaire. (See Table #2) Female advertising executives are significantly more apt to agree that they were shown affection by their parents and that they had a close relationship to their parents. This childhood experience of greater emotional security may make female advertising executives more empathic with the social needs of others as adults.

## Discussion

Female advertising executives self-report a greater amount of socially responsible behavior than do male advertising executives. Female executives exhibit this through many varied areas of concern, especially in the areas of advertising content which deal with sex-related topics, "portrayal of married life" and "sex appeals." Female executives are also more modest in their expressed interest to serve the social needs of the public than are male executives. Why is there this discrepancy in findings? Do female advertising executives find socially responsible behavior a more natural mode of behavior without having to "work" at it? Childhood experiences may be the answer. Certainly, further research is needed.

Because of sampling and response limitations the study reported here should be replicated. A content analysis of decisions made by male and female

advertising executives would be useful. Likewise, an experimental study which provides socially responsible decision-making possibilities for male and female advertising executives should be undertaken. Finally, researchers need to delve into one's life experiences which are most highly predictive of socially responsible professional behavior. Once aware of these experiences, methods could be developed to increase their occurence.

## Footnotes

(1) John A. Howard and James Hulbert, "Advertising and the Public Interest," Journal of Advertising Research, 14:33-39 (December 1974).

(2) Stuart H. Surlin, "Fatalism and Authoritarianism: Predictors of Professional Attitudes in Journalism," Journalism Quarterly, 53: 68-73 (Spring 1976).

(3) Ibid.

(4) Stuart H. Surlin and John D. Leckenby, "The Authoritarian Personality: Its Relationship to Entering the Advertising Field and Socially Responsible Advertising Behavior," American Academy of Advertising Conference Proceedings, Newport, Rhode Island, April 1974, pp. 203-216.

(5) Stuart H. Surlin, "Male-Female Ad Students Differ in 'Image' Perceptions," Journalism Educator, 32 (April 1977), in press.

(6) Stuart H. Surlin, "Authoritarian Advertising Executives and the Use of Black Models in Advertising: Implications for Racial Relations," Journal of Black Studies, in press.

(7) Eleanor Clift, "Ideas for Sale," Atlanta Magazine, 13: 65-75 (May 1973).

(8) James T. Lull, et. al., "Women's Perceptions of Stereotypic Role Portrayals in Television Commercials," paper presented at the Speech Communication Association Convention, Houston, Texas, December 1975; Marya Mannes, "Television: The Splitting Image," Saturday Review, November 14, 1970; Pamela Cheles-Miller, "Reactions to Marital Roles in Commercials," Journal of Advertising Research, 15:45-49 (August 1975); Harry J. Skornia, Television and Society (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1965).

(9) Linda J. Busby, "Sex Role Research on the Mass Media," Journal of Communication, 25: 107-131 (Autumn 1975); Alice E. Courtney and Thomas W. Whipple, "Women in TV Commercials," Journal of Communication, 24: 110-118 (Spring 1974); Donald E. Sexton and Phyliss Haberman, "Women in Magazine Advertisements," Journal of Advertising Research, 14: 41-45 (August 1974); Charles Winick, "Sex and Advertising," in Robert J. Glessing and William P. White (Eds.), Mass Media: The Invisible Environment (Chicago: Science Research Associates, Inc., 1973); Lawrence H. Wortzel and John M. Frisbie, "Woman's Role Portrayal Preferences in Advertisements: An Empirical Study," Journal of Marketing, 38: 41-46 (October 1974).

Table #1

Mean Score and t-Test Comparisons
for Self-Reported Socially Responsible
Behavior by Male and Female
Advertising Executives

(N=112)
(1-5 Scale, 1=Strongly Agree, 5=Strongly Disagree)

| Socially Responsible Behavior | Mean Scores Overall | Male (n=85) | Female (n=27) | t-Test (df=110) | Sig. Level |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. I would use a vanity appeal to advertise cosmetic, diet, or other similar products. | 2.05 | 2.04 | 2.11 | 0.44 | ns |
| 2. I would misuse the English language in order to advertise a product. | 3.29 | 3.21 | 3.56 | 1.33 | ns |
| 3. I would dramatize war scenes to advertise children's war toys, dolls, and games. | 4.04 | 3.94 | 4.33 | 1.72 | .10 |
| 4. I would not use black models in advertisements other than for black oriented products. | 3.94 | 3.95 | 3.88 | 0.30 | ns |
| 5. I would use a sex appeal in an advertisement. | 2.34 | 2.19 | 2.81 | 3.58 | .001 |
| 6. I would use scenes depicting violence in my advertisements. | 4.01 | 3.86 | 4.48 | 2.69 | .01 |
| 7. I would use "snob appeals" in my advertisements. | 2.61 | 2.48 | 3.00 | 2.25 | .05 |
| 8. I would use puffery in my advertisements. | 3.29 | 3.15 | 3.74 | 2.59 | .02 |
| 9. I would portray married life as problems that can be solved by the purchasing of products. | 3.79 | 3.65 | 4.26 | 2.99 | .01 |
| 10. I would portray love in an advertisement as the spending of money and giving of goods. | 3.54 | 3.46 | 3.78 | 1.28 | ns |
| 11. I would use fear appeals in my advertisements | 3.59 | 3.45 | 4.04 | 2.26 | .05 |
| 12. I would use people being wasteful of material resources in an advertisement. | 4.07 | 3.93 | 4.52 | 2.71 | .01 |

Table #2

Biographical Data Mean Score and t-Test Differences
Between Male and Female Advertising Executives

(N=112)

| Item | Mean Scores for Advertising Executives: Male (n=85) | Female (n=27) | t-Test (df=110) | Sig. Level |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| (1) I am highly interested in serving the social needs of the public. (1-5 scale, 1=strongly agree, 5=strongly disagree) | 2.19 | 2.63 | 2.19 | .05 |
| (2) How likely were your parents to give you affection, praise, and attention when you had done something well? (1-5 scale, 1=much more than most parents, 5=less than most parents) | 2.67 | 2.07 | 2.52 | .02 |
| (3) How would you characterize your relationship to your father? (1-4 scale, 1=very close, 4=not close at all) | 2.39 | 1.89 | 2.54 | .02 |
| (4) How would you characterize your relationship to your mother? (1-4 scale, 1=very close, 4=not close at all) | 2.24 | 1.70 | 3.04 | .01 |